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The Free Lance-Star

From idea to reality

Area's top seniors shine in inaugural boys soccer all-star match. **SPORTS, PAGE B1**



Steak salad

Take summer fare up a notch. **FOOD, PAGE C1**



Wednesday, June 24, 2026

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

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US school workers face layoffs

Districts grappling with end of pandemic aid, fewer students

ERIN HUDSON
Bloomberg News

Thousands of U.S. public-school employees have received warnings saying they could lose their jobs as the nation's education system grapples with

mounting financial pressures.

Reductions have been looming for months, in what some officials say is the biggest such wave in more than a decade. Leaders at seven of the nation's 10 largest school districts have said they're looking to reduce staff to balance budgets.

Nearly 660 positions in the Los Angeles Unified School District were cut. Chicago's system is targeting reductions, while the

district serving the Las Vegas area is eliminating around 700 roles. Districts in Florida's Broward, Palm Beach and Orange counties and Houston's system are facing similar stress, as are Boston, Cleveland, Milwaukee and Philadelphia.

Officials say the strains have intensified as they reckon with sinking enrollment, rising costs for labor and materials and the expiration of pandemic-era

federal aid. Many had tapped those funds to boost hiring, driving a surge in local governments' educational staffing. Now, they're being forced to whittle those numbers back.

"These are all things that are really coming to a head that is really making this time very challenging, not only for our system, but a lot of urban systems across the country," said Warren Morgan, CEO of Cleveland

Metropolitan School District, which is poised to let go roughly 400 employees.

The cuts the district carried out at the end of the school year were the first since 2011, he says, and the system is closing or merging 29 of its 93 schools. Enrollment has plummeted by around half in the past couple decades, to about 34,000 students.

Please see **LAYOFFS**, Page A9

Wildlife agency gets loan from state

ANNA BRYSON
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources has taken out a \$6.9 million loan from the state treasury to cover payroll, overdue contractor payments and travel reimbursements after officials determined earlier this year that projected revenues and spending cuts would not be enough to finish the fiscal year with a positive fund balance.

The agency has suffered financially in recent years as revenues were outpaced by inflation, and requests for funding from the legislature have been denied.

The Department of Wildlife Resources, which was called the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries until 2020, is responsible for enforcing the state's hunting, fishing and boating laws and managing the state's 50 wildlife management areas.

Please see **WILDLIFE**, Page A9

STORMS DAMAGE TREES IN STAFFORD



PETER CIHELKA, THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Damaged trees were visible on neighboring properties along Coal Landing Road near Government Island in Stafford County on Tuesday. Strong storms pushed through the area on Monday evening, causing power outages and tree damage.

A handshake to remember on America's 250th birthday

DAVY MEISTER
for the Culpeper Star-Exponent

Unless I unknowingly inherited some Methuselah-like DNA, I will not be around to celebrate our nation's next major birthday — tricentennial, 50 years from now.

As a 21-year-old Airman First Class stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base near Lexington, Mass., celebrating the year leading up to the bicentennial was beyond special.

Air Force One, with President Gerald R. Ford onboard, landed at our base on that bright sunny April morning. Within minutes, he walked down the tarmac and headed over to an awaiting color guard, of which I was a member.

Our 38th President shook every outstretched hand on that flight line — including a giddy 21-year-old, still very green Kansas boy, who excitedly

managed to shake a presidential hand with his right hand while feverishly snapping photos from a Kodak "go anywhere" pocket camera with his left.

I still have and cherish these photos!

Meanwhile, Pat, my darling bride of one year, was preparing, with her Hanscom AFB unit, to march in a Bicentennial parade in front of President Ford — yards away from Lexington Battle Green, famous as the site of the first armed encounter of the American Revolutionary War on April 19, 1775.

Some Bicentennial!
Fast forward 50 years.
Our nation's 250th birthday

Please see **HANDSHAKE**, Page A9

Culpeper puts on patriotic show

Little Theatre's production will run on July 4 weekend

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION
Culpeper Star-Exponent

"We the People: The Musical" promotes the general welfare for Independence Day Weekend in Culpeper for America250, and it could even help form a more perfect community with its U.S. Constitution inspiration.

The production of Culpeper Little Theatre goes on stage at 7 p.m. on Friday, July 3 and again at 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 4, at the American Legion Post 330 on Rixeyville Road. The effort celebrates the blessings of liberty.

Written by Pat Cook with music and lyrics by Bill Francoeur, "We the People: The Musical" combines music, humor, and historical reflections into a family-friendly celebration of America and the preamble of the founding document.



PHOTO BY DAVY MEISTER

Lead performers for Culpeper Little Theatre's "We the People: The Musical" plan for their July 4th weekend production. Seated (from left) are Chelsea Caish, Tara Donnelly, and Carolyn Bell. Brian MacLean and Jackie Davis stand behind.

Please see **MUSICAL**, Page A9

For more on the forecast, see our daily online videos.

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Weather

Mostly sunny and warmer
High: 85 Low: 62
Forecast: B6

Inside

ADVICE	C3	FOOD	C1	OBITUARIES	A5	SUDOKU	C5
CLASSIFIEDS	A7	HOROSCOPE	C3	OPINION	A4	TV PAGE	C4
COMICS	C5	MARKETS	A6	SPORTS	B1	WEATHER	B6

